No. 79

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

It was customary for performers to sit at tables with patrons, and Flora did not hesitate to sit with me.
"This is no place for you," I told her.

R. of M. G., No. 78.

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SOMETHING like an angry hiss escaped Alice's lips, when she heard George Ballard say that her husband was determined to prosecute her to the full extent of the law and had engaged one of the best private detectives in order to find her.

"You were slick enough to fool them all, though," Ballard went on. "At the inquest, the coroner's verdict was that Miss Desmond had come to her death by a person unknown.

"That ends it unless someone squeals on you, and I hope you won't compel me to be the one to do it. I may claim the virtue of remaining loyal to old friends in trouble."

At last Alice saw the light. Ballard expected her to continue his former friendly relations with her. But would he stop there?

She bitterly resented his intrusion at this time. And unless she got rid of him in some way, he would spoil all her plans for the future.

She was already desperately in love with young Robert Ames. If she played her cards shrewdly, she would become his wife.

"What do you want me to do?" she inquired, her hands folded in her lap.

"Who were the people I saw you with last night?" was Ballard's counter question. "What are they to you and what are you to them? I must know that before I say anything further."

Alice explained in a low, tense voice.

"The Ames' are very wealthy people and the old lady is most kind to me," she ended. "I thoroughly enjoy the work I am doing, for the pay is liberal and the conditions are ideal."

"What is your game, Alice?" he demanded directly. "Are you gunning for the old one or the young

one?"

"You are taking too much for granted, George," she explained. "I am not gunning for any man. They are all alike in one respect. They expect a woman to give everything and give nothing in return."

With an impulsive motion Ballard took a hold of her hands and held them.

"That is not true in my case," he said earnestly. "I'd give my life to hear you say that you love me, Alice. It nearly bankrupted me to come all the way to Venice to find you. But that does not matter. There is plenty of easy money to be made right here.

"Italy at present is overrun with rich tourists from every country on the globe. You with your beauty, and I furnishing the brain, can form a combination that is hard to beat. I'll marry you at once if you say the word.

"We'll start all over again, just you and I. No, don't object," he cried, when Alice was about to speak. "Our marriage will be perfectly legal, for Gordon will no doubt divorce you."

Alice had been on the verge of saying that she had never been Philip Gordon's legal wife.

Instead she said, after some deliberation:

"Let me think this over for a few days, George, dear. And I want you to know that I thoroughly appreciate your offer of marriage. I am really pleasantly surprised. I expected you to demand things a single woman, who still respects herself, can not give."

"Then you'll marry me?" he exclaimed so loud that people seated on the other benches looked up, somewhat startled.

"Please be careful, George," Alice begged. "As I told you before, I am not yet ready to give you a decisive answer. I shall be in Venice for another two

months. I will meet you whenever I can. If you are short on funds, I'll furnish the cash so you can live decently. Is that satisfactory?"

Ballard knew something about the kind of women who are ready and willing to support men with the money they earn.

Although he did not like to place Alice in that category, he was more than pleased to hear her offer.

"No, I don't need your money just yet," he declared. "I'll do a little gold digging of my own. And I am happy that you are willing to meet me occasionally. I think," he added after a slight pause, "it would be well for both of us if I changed hotels."

"By all means do that," Alice agreed quickly. "No one must come to suspect that there is anything between us."

They parted a few minutes later. George Ballard felt confident that he had won Alice over to his way of thinking. And she had been rather gracious about it all, he thought.

She must really care about him, or she would never have offered to supply him with ready cash. A slow smile overspread his features and lingered.

Alice, on her way back to the hotel, was smiling too. But her smile had a vicious twist. And her eyes wore the expression of a tigress which refuses to be balked.

But George Ballard was equally sure that this lovely woman could not escape him now. Of course, he loved her after a fashion. He loved as any man of his character could love any woman.

As he stood there watching Alice fade from view, he grinned diabolically.

"I wonder what she would say and do if I told her the truth about what really happened in Miami. It might

relieve her mind quite a bit. But I am not such a fool."

And Alice, on her way to the hotel, had but one thought in her madly churning mind. She must rid herself of George Ballard.

She was now on the verge of stepping into a very cozy berth. If she became Mrs. Robert Ames, all the rest of the world could go hang.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she asked herself over and over again. "I hate him! I hate him! Why did he have to follow me here and threaten to make trouble for me? God knows I have been punished enough, and I have a right to a little happiness at last."

But Alice had only begun the punishment a relentless fate held in store for her.

Chapter 261

A FIENDISH WOMAN

WHEN THE Ames family returned in time for dinner, they found Alice in the best of health and quite cheerful. While they ate they talked a great deal about the trip into the mountains. The scenes were wonderful. The little Italian village where they had luncheon was exquisite. The service had been excellent and the expense small.

These, and many other things formed the main topic of conversation with Miss Procter as an interested listener.

"Too bad you weren't with us," Mrs. Ames said to her companion.

"I am sorry I was not able to go," Alice replied with a covert glance at the handsome son. "I was very lonesome during your absence."

"Is your headache entirely gone?" young Robert Ames wanted to know.

"Yes," she said with a frank smile, which caused the father a quick pang of jealousy. "I am feeling just splendid, really."

After dinner was over, Mrs. Ames, feeling very tired, went to her room. Alice helped the old lady undress and waited for further orders. Usually she read to Mrs. Ames until the latter dropped off to sleep.

"You won't have to read to me to-night, my dear," she said with a yawn. "The fresh mountain air has made me sleepy. Go down and keep the men company on the veranda.

"I commission you to keep them from forsaking

the straight and narrow path. Men are men, you know," she added with a mischievous, knowing smile. "Not that I am afraid of Robert going astray."

Alice experienced a disagreeable sensation. Evidently Mrs. Ames did not trust her husband.

"I am sure Mr. Ames would not disgrace himself by paying attention to another woman," she defended warmly. "He is so proud and such a perfect gentleman. I think he is a model man."

"Do you?" the old lady exclaimed. "Well, it would not surprise me to hear some of these days that he tried to kiss you, Miss Procter."

The latter blushed to the roots of her hair.

It was not a blush of maidenly shame. Not by any means. The blush had been called forth by Mrs. Ames' searching gaze. It was the blush of guilt.

"Oh, Mrs. Ames," she cried, trying vainly to hide her confusion. "I hope you do not think that I would allow him——"

"No, I don't think that, my dear child," came the quick interruption. "I know you are a level-headed and a decent girl. And perhaps I ought to be ashamed to say such things about my husband. But they are quite true.

"Charles has a soft spot for young feminine beauty. If you have not found that out already, let this prepare you and serve as a warning. He is bound to make love to you sooner or later, I know his weakness, but he can not help it."

Alice needed neither any preparation nor a warning. She had found out for herself the first day she entered her employment as Mrs. Ames' companion.

She left the boudoir, undecided what to do. She disliked the idea of sitting alone with Charles Ames and young Robert.

She had more than an inkling that Robert was interested in her. How the father felt, she knew from experience.

She knew also that she would have to be careful, for the older man already had shown signs of becoming jealous of his son.

Nevertheless she went out.

Father and son were smoking complacently. The older man's eyes lit up at sight of her, while Robert moved a vacant chair and placed it between him and his father.

"It is nice of you to come down and keep us company, Miss Procter," he said with a pleasant laugh. "Isn't it, dad?"

"Indeed, it is," Charles Ames agreed, puffing more vigorously at his cigar. "We men like to have a woman around us, don't we, Robert? It sort of balances us."

Robert nodded and flashed Alice a grin.

After a few preliminary remarks, the topic of conversation again turned to the trip into the mountains.

"There is one place which interested me very much," Robert said. "The guide showed us a very dangerous spot which is called 'Suicide Cliff'. He explained that at least a dozen men have jumped off in an effort to end it all. It is a most grewsome place. It made me shudder."

Alice shuddered, too, but she was instantly on the alert.

"How far is it to this suicide rock?" she queried, slanting a quick glance at the speaker.

"Only about thirty-five miles out of the city," the elder Ames broke in at this point. "And I disagree with my son when he says the place is grewsome. I never saw anything more beautiful and impressing in my life. There is a drop of nearly a thousand feet into a lake."

"Oh," gasped Alice, and shuddered again. "I suppose the man who jumps off that cliff hasn't much of a chance."

"Not any," declared Robert. "The lake at that point is said to be fifty feet deep. After a drop of a thousand feet, the strongest swimmer could not survive. Well, those who jump don't want to live, and that ends it, I guess."

"Yes, that ends it," she repeated as if speaking to herself.

What was said after that, Alice scarcely heard. Her mind was busy with a plan which had found birth in her brain during the conversation about suicide rock.

Two or three times she stifled a yawn, then finally rose.

"I hope you'll excuse me now, gentlemen," she remarked casually.

"Of course we will," the elder Ames said. "I guess we'll all turn in pretty soon. Pleasant dreams, Miss Procter."

Robert Ames was looking away at that moment.

As Alice passed the old man's chair, he quickly seized her hand and touched it with his lips. She in turn, patted his cheek.

"Good night," said Alice.

"Good night, Miss Procter," came from Robert, still gazing in the same direction. His words were echoed by the father.

That night Alice lay awake for a long while. Occasionally a peculiar smile played about the corners of her sensual lips.

The only connecting link between the present and the wretched past was George Ballard. With him out of the way she had nothing to fear.

She considered well every angle of the plan she hoped to execute at the earliest possible moment. At last she dropped into a fitful sleep.

The following day was destined to be a memorable one for Alice. Mrs. Ames was indisposed and did not get out of bed. Charles Ames and his son had been invited to a gathering of Italian bankers at the chamber of commerce.

There was to be a dinner at two o'clock in the afternoon, with a classy entertainment furnished by a theatrical company afterward.

"I don't think we'll be back much before six o'clock Mathilda," the elder Ames told his wife. "I hope you'll feel better by that time."

"There is nothing to worry about, Charles," the old lady said with a smile. "Besides, I have Miss Procter to take care of me. I suppose I'll be sleeping most of the time. I get so frightfully tired lately."

True to her word, Mrs. Ames slept all through the morning, with Alice seated at the window, reading.

When she awoke at twelve, she ate a little lunch.

"Now then," she said, as she settled herself again comfortably among the pillows, "I won't need you for the rest of the afternoon, Alice. I want you to go out and get a bit of fresh air. A long walk along the quay would do you good."

"Thank you, Mrs. Ames," Alice said gratefully. "I think I will take a vigorous walk. But are you quite sure you won't need me?"

The old lady shook her head.

"Quite sure, my dear. These attacks are nothing new. I get them every once in a while. After a day or two in bed I always feel better. That is what advancing years will do to a woman. And I was never very strong."

Having listened patiently until Mrs. Ames finished speaking, Alice waited until the latter had closed her eyes, then tip-toed from the room.

Fifteen minutes later she had George Ballard on the telephone.

"I'm off for the afternoon," she told him with a pleased chuckle. "I'll be glad to spend it with you. Let's go somewhere. You know, I saw very little of this city since I came."

"Where do you want to go?" Ballard asked.

"Anywhere, dear," she cooed. "If the choice is left to me, I'd say let's take a long automobile drive into the mountains. I am told you can see some wonderful sights there." She paused a moment, then added very sweetly: "You know I would rather be all alone with you this afternoon."

Ballard was overjoyed at hearing the woman express herself like that. She must love him or she would not be so anxious and prompt to meet him again. Poor, deluded man.

"Alright, I'll meet you anywhere you say," he cried joyfully.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," suggested Alice, "I'll get a car and meet you one square east of your hotel. Will that suit you?"

"Absolutely, sweetheart," came back. "How soon?"

"In thirty minutes, George."

"Good. I'll be there, Alice."

That ended the telephone conversation. In less than twenty minutes Alice was dressed for the trip.

With the heavy veil drawn over her features, she walked briskly to the nearest garage and hired an automobile with a driver.

She tipped the man handsomely as she inquired:

"Do you know the way to Suicide Cliff?"

"Certainly," came back with a sheepish grin. "Does the signora think about ending her beautiful self?"

"No, not that," she retorted. "My brother and I would like to see the cliff. We'll pick him up down the street. He is one of the American engineers engaged to build a railroad through one of the mountain districts. He lives at one of the villages. I can't think of the name. It sounds so funny."

The dumb Italian chauffeur swallowed the story. All that interested him was the roll of bills his lovely fare flashed.

At the place agreed upon over the telephone, they picked up George Ballard. He was in a gay mood and beamed happily upon Alice.

This was one of the days he would remember for the rest of his life. The trip into the mountains with Alice alone, was the first sign of her capitulation.

The chauffeur knew the various mountain roads and passes very well. Nearly all American tourists engaged him because he could speak English quite fluently. And he was a remarkably good driver.

Another thing, he had learned to be deaf and dumb. If the man in the rear seat wanted to kiss the woman with him, that was their business.

If they wanted to be taken to a village Inn where private rooms could be had for a cheap price without any questions being asked, he knew where to go.

Alice could not have hired a better and safer man. She had told him that she and her brother wanted to go to Suicide Cliff, and he was taking them there as speedily as possible.

George Ballard, his elation increasing every mile they traveled, made love openly to Alice.

She did not object when he drew her into his arms and kissed her passionately. Had she not promised to become his wife as soon as she had thought the matter over for a few days.

"This is the finest scenery I have seen anywhere," he exclaimed enthusiastically as the machine reached the peak of a mountain. "Look at that lake down there. Isn't it glorious."

"It is glorious," the woman agreed, and then the automobile stopped.

"You wish to see the cliff, signora," the driver said, addressing Alice. "This is as close as I can take you. There is the path. A ten minute walk will bring you there."

Ballard jumped out and assisted his beautiful companion to the ground. Arm in arm they walked up a steep hill.

Alice looked back only once. The driver was seated again in the car, complacently puffing at a cigarette. Well, there was no danger of him following them. She smiled.

At last they reached Suicide Cliff. It was one of the most magnificent spots to be seen in any country. Above was the wonderfuly clear sky.

Hard and beautifully colored rock lay underfoot. Scores of other mountain peaks were visible. Some of them were covered with snow.

Neither Alice nor the man with her spoke. It was so quiet that every breath they drew could be heard.

Curiosity—fatal curiosity, drew George Ballard toward the cliff. Alice followed him, always a step behind. Suddenly he stopped and drew back.

"Gosh, it makes me dizzy to look down," he declared.

"Where is your nerve, dear?" she teased. "I want

to see what is below. If you are afraid, you better keep back."

Ballard did step back. His heart nearly stopped beating as Alice walked to the very edge of the cliff and peered down.

One false move, or a momentary loss of perfect balance, meant certain death.

With her face as pale as the snow in the distance, Alice stood there, her splendid figure showing against the blue sky.

Finally she turned.

"Take a look, George," she said. "In all your life you'll never see any thing like it again."

And no truer words had ever been spoken.

Although white as a ghost, Ballard was determined to show this woman that he was not wanting in nerve.

As she stepped aside to make room for him, the silence was intense. He stooped over. The next instant he uttered a fearful cry.

It was hushed when he whirled downward with incredible speed, his body turning over and over.

Alice, with a fiendish expression on her face, did not look after the disappearing man. George Ballard would trouble her no longer. With utmost coolness she sat on a nearby rock and powdered her nose.

She waited until ten minutes had passed, then walked slowly back to the waiting automobile.

The chauffeur saw her coming, and he looked at her with a questioning look in his eyes.

"I guess you wonder what became of my brother," she laughed. And what a hard, metallic laugh it was. "He insisted upon walking down to the village. He likes plenty of vigorous exercise."

"Very well, signora," the man grinned. "You go

back to the city now?"

"Yes, take me back.,' Alice dropped upon the seat with a sigh of intense relief.

As the car turned about she had a last glimpse of a place she hoped never to see again. There was no fear that the Italian chauffeur would doubt her statement.

And if he did, it could not make much difference. The heavy veil over her face made recognition impossible, though they should meet again.

She had not given him any name, and he did not know where she lived or who she was. Nor did he know who George Ballard was.

The latter's failure to return to his hotel simply meant that he had left Venice without paying his bill. Such things are common.

But Alice failed to take one possibility into consideration. A man falling almost a thousand feet and dropping into fiftey feet of water, could still survive if he had the needed stamina.

And if a fishing boat should happen to be near enough to pick him up, he would not be much worse for wear.

Chapter 262

THE DAWN OF HAPPINESS

PHILIP GORDON had arrived home after his hair-raising experience in the Canadian forest. True to his promise to the trapper, he did not speak of it to anyone, although he might have done so safely enough. A week after his return the newspapers devoted much space to the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Fredericks, the New York and Chicago financier.

According to the information available, he had last been seen near his mountain cottage.

A painfully reminiscent smile lingered on Gordon's face as he read this. And repeatedly he shuddered, for the harrowing experience through which he had passed, had left a mark on him.

The first thing he did was to institute divorce proceedings against Alice.

It was the only sure way to avoid future complications even though his first wife should turn up some day. But before he took that step, he had a long talk with Miss Desmond.

When he told her about his intentions, her eyes lit up with sudden joy. Could it be possible that the barrier which stood between her and the man she loved was to be removed at last.

"Yes, it is the only thing to do," he went on gravely. "I have stood for enough from that woman. Ah, what a fool I was to make her my wife."

Marie looked at him with her very soul in her eyes.

"But can you obtain a divorce from her under existing conditions?" she asked softly. "You don't know where she is, and——"

"That does not make the least difference," Phil interrupted, his jaw moving with new determination. "All the law requires that my petition for an absolute divorce shall be published in the newspapers. If she does not respond, it will make it all the easier for me."

For a while neither spoke again. It was difficult for Marie to keep from betraying herself right then and there.

She had suffered enough through the long separation from the man who was still her husband in the eyes of the law and in the sight of Heaven.

No one but herself knew the tortures she had been compelled to endure.

"Have — have you given up the idea of finding her?" she queried at length.

"I have," he told her. "It is useless to prolong this wild goose chase. I have already instructed the private detective agency to cease all activities in that direction and send me a bill for the services rendered to date. That will be the end.

"The last information obtained by the men detailed on the case, was that Alice had left the country. It is perhaps the best thing that could have happened. We can rest assured that she will be punished.

"She will punish herself. It would not surprise me to read some of these days that Alice took her own life. Women like her usually end up that way."

Marie moved a little in her chair.

She brushed across her eyes with one of her hands as if to remove an obstacle that obstructed her vision.

"Is — is there any danger of Alice ever coming back here?" she inquired falteringly. "She might even

come before you get your divorce. In that case I would have to leave."

"Why she wouldn't dare!" cried Phil, his handsome face suddenly pale with anger. "She wouldn't dare!"

"Alice is a daring woman, Mr. Gordon. Both of us know that."

"Oh, yes, she is that, Miss Desmond. But she values her liberty too high to take such chances. She knows what's in store for her if she ever returns to Chicago. She'll be arrested on sight for trying to poison you.

"But the fact that she has left this country precludes any such possibility. We have seen the last of her. You may rest assured of that."

The lovely governess breathed a sigh of relief. She felt she could not stand the strain much longer.

To be alone with Phil, and hear his dear voice without throwing herself into his arms, was agonizing.

"If—if you are through with me," stammered, "I'll go back to the children."

Gordon was not yet through with the beautiful creature who was sacrificing herself for him and his children.

He wanted to tell her how he appreciated her services and how passionately he loved her.

He wanted her promise that she would marry him if his efforts to locate his first wife remained without fruit.

Marie saw the yearning look in his eyes. She saw how his hand was partly raised as if to stay her.

She saw his lips move as if about to speak the words that must not be spoken at this time.

She fled precipitately to escape an ordeal which would be extremely painful to them both.

In the nursery the children were impatiently a-

waiting for her. She swept them into her arms and hugged them stormily.

Her pent-up emotions found an outlet in a flood of happy tears.

"What is the matter?" the boy asked, looking at the weeping governess with big, troubled eye. "Has our mama come back again?"

"No, she hasn't, Harry, darling," she answered, swallowing hard.

"Then why are you crying?" little Phyllis spoke up.

"Because I am so happy." She kissed the girl. "I am happy because I shall never leave you again. And just think of the wonderful times we'll have together. Won't we, Harry?"

The boy's face became illuminated with a beautiful smile.

"You bet we will," he declared stoutly.

From that day on a different spirit pervaded Oak Manor.

Although Marie was still called by her assumed name, she took full charge of all the household affairs.

She avoided Phil as much as possible. And for some reason he avoided her.

The only time they met now was in the nursery and in the presence of the children. No part of their conversation ever was allowed to drift into a personal channel.

"If you read the paper to-day, you'll probably see something that will interest you, Miss Desmond," he told her one morning as he was ready to leave for his Chicago office. "I suppose, it will give my friends something to talk about. But," he added with a wistful smile, "it cannot be helped."

As soon as he had gone, Marie rushed into the

library.

The morning paper was lying on the table. This was contrary to custom, for Phil always took the paper with him.

"I guess he left it purposely," Marie smiled as she picked it up and began to peruse the pages.

At last she found what she so anxiously looked for. In the columns devoted to Court News exclusively, she read Philip Gordon's declaration to the world that he desired an absolute divorce from his wife Alice.

Mr. R. W. Shields was the attorney for the plaintive.

She pressed the paper to her bosom as she raised her eyes heavenward in a prayer of thanksgiving. Ah, how glad she was that Mr. Shields had taken charge of Phil's side of the controversy.

After the formality of a divorce there was nothing in the way of a happy reunion with her husband.

Already she began to wonder what he would say when he learned that she was not Miss Desmond, the governess, but Marie, his first wife.

She was about to send for Annie and tell her the good news, when the telephone rang.

She took the receiver off the hook and answered with a very pleasant: "Hello."

"This is Mr. Shields speaking," came back.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Shields," she cried, unable to control the quiver of happiness in her voice. "This is Marie."

"I want to see you some time to-day," the old lawyer told her.

"Any particular time, Mr. Shields?"

"Make it two o'clock if that is convenient for you, Marie."

"Yes, that will do," the latter smiled into the

transmitter. "I'll be at your office at two."

She waited for him to speak again, but he had evidently hung up. Replacing the receiver on the hook she went in search of Annie.

Behind closed doors these two indulged in a lengthy chat and both emerged an hour later with moist eyes.

It was indeed a happy woman who climbed into the Gordon family limousine to be driven to Chicago.

Ah, what a wonderful place the world was. Forgotten were all miseries of the past. Forgotten were all the indignities and insults she had suffered at the hands of Alice.

Not the slightest cloud marred the horizon of Marie's future. She felt sure that Mr. Shields wanted to see her in connection with the pending divorce suit.

Upon her arrival at Mr. Shields' office, an unpleasant surprise awaited her. Her sister Julia was seated in the lawyer's private office, and she was in tears.

"Why, what is the matter?" Marie inquired after greeting her old friend and adviser. "What's happened to you, Julia?"

Mr. Shields explained.

Julia, in the capacity of a charity nurse, had been sent to a house on the West side to take care of a poor woman, whose husband was a confirmed bootlegger and drunkard. His name was Sam Perkins.

The man had forced his attention upon the pretty nurse. She had repulsed him by slapping his face.

In an effort to be revenged upon her, he had placed a quart of moonshine in Julia's bag. Then he had informed the prohibition officers who arrested her on the way home.

And now Julia Carey was charged with transport-

ing liquor in violation of the Eighteenth Amendent. She had sent for Mr. Shields, who furnished the required bond.

"It is just a case of being framed by that fellow," the old lawyer ended. "But I am afraid we'll have a hard time proving that he put the moonshine in her bag. I am not so sure that it can be done after the trial."

Marie took her sister in her arms and tried to comfort her.

"I'll see you through, dear," she soothed. "Don't let that worry you. Let me see," she added. "The name Perkins is familiar. If it's the same man I have in mind, he worked for—for Phil at one time. He was discharged. But don't worry."

"No, it is you who will have to worry, Marie," Mr. Shields said with customary directness. "It won't sound very well to read that a sister of Mrs. Philip Gordon has been convicted of bootlegging."

Every vestige of color fled from Marie's lovely face.

"Oh, why did that have to happen now?" she complained.

"Why does anything happen," said the lawyer gruffly.

"Please don't be angry," Julia sobbed. "God only knows I am innocent. I could not help it. When that beastly prohibition officer accosted me and found the whiskey in my bag, he treated me like a common criminal. But that is not the worst of it. He knew me when —when——"

She could go no further, and broke into another flood of tears.

Marie looked appealingly at Mr. Shields who tactfully quitted the office, leaving the two sisters alone.

"Now tell me everything," Marie asked softly as

she took a seat close to Julia. "I don't want you to hide a thing from me. If any lawyer can get you out of this mess, Mr. Shields is the one to do it. Come now, dry those tears and give me your confidence."

Julia gave an involuntary shiver. How could she tell her sister that she had sunk to the lowest depth.

Although now she was atoning for her sins by giving herself to Charity, she doubted very much that Marie would condone some of the follies and reckless exploits in which she had indulged before her soul became purified by suffering and remorse.

Since her meeting with Phil, Julia had taken precious good care not to meet him again. When her name was mentioned in the newspapers, it was always Miss Carrel, the charity nurse, instead of Julia Carey, the former actress.

Not a single one of her old friends and acquaintances had ever recognized her in the somber garb of a charity nurse.

"Why are you hesitating?" Marie inquired gently as her sister remained in silent thoughtfulness.

Julia was about to speak when Mr. Shields rushed into the room. It was not very often that this quiet and self-contained gentleman became excited and showed it. But he showed very plainly now that he was not only excited, but also worried.

"Get into the next room, both of you!" he cried, keeping his voice down. "Please be quick. And stay there until I give you permission to come out."

He became unusually active in assisting the two women to do his bidding.

The moment Marie and Julia disappeared, he closed the door behind them and locked it. Then he sat down at his desk and touched the hidden bell. This brought the office boy on the run.

"Bring the gentleman who just called, in here, Johnny," he said.

Chapter 263

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM

THE STAY of the Ames family at Venice, had been cut short quite unexpectedly. A threatening financial crisis caused the directors of the bank, of which Charles Ames was the president, to send a cablegram to the latter. Preparations to return home were made at once.

The party which boarded the steamer at Genoa consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Ames, young Robert Ames, and Alice Procter. Among the four were two who welcomed the sudden summons home to the States.

Alice was particularly anxious to get away from Venice for reasons she did not care to divulge.

She was constantly haunted by the fear that George Ballard would turn up again some of these days.

Although such a thing appeared utterly impossible in the face of existing facts. No human being could survive a fall of nearly a thousand feet.

Alice knew this well enough, and yet she was afraid. A guilty conscience can not be hushed.

Charles Ames was the other who had no desire to remain in Venice any longer. His handsome young son and the beautiful companion of his wife, saw entirely too much of one another.

And there was no possible chance of preventing them from being alone together occasionally.

Alice's continued attitude toward the old gentleman was more than a promise. She encouraged him openly.

His love for her had become a passionate desire

Nothing but absolute possession of her could satisfy him.

To attain this, Charles Ames was ready to barter immortal soul—yes, more than that!

There was no request he was not ready to grant. With utter disregard for the happiness of his loyal wife and son, he made his plans.

He was shrewd enough to see that Alice was angling for his boy. That she was nothing more than a smooth adventuress, he surmised by her action toward him.

But even though an adventuress, Alice was the most tempting, the most desirable bit of feminine loveliness he had ever encountered.

As soon as the Ames family was comfortable settled at the palatial home in Philadelphia, the head of the household began to show his hand.

The financial crisis proved nothing more than a scare. One of the bank directors had become panicky without any real reason.

"What you need is a month's vacation, my boy," Charles Ames said to his son one night as they sat alone in their den enpoying an after-dinner smoke. "Why not go hunting for a while?"

The suggestion was eagerly accepted by the unsuspecting young man.

And the manner in which he accepted it seemed to make it rather plain that there was no serious attachment between him and his mother's lovely companion.

"I would love to, dad," he exclaimed, his fine eyes lighting up with real pleasure. "But—but do you think you could spare me at the bank for a whole month?"

"That is not the question," the father responded generously. "Your health is the paramount issue. You have not been looking any too well lately. Run down the

Delaware river and shoot some duck. Or if you would rather, you can go to the farm. I am told quail and rabbits are plentiful this year."

Robert's mind was made up quickly. He slapped his father on the back as he cried:

"Alright, I am off to-morrow morning. And don't you send for me until the month is up. I may stay a little longer," he added with a boyish smile. "And in that case——"

"Stay as long as you like," Charles Ames cut in. "But don't get into any mischief. You better take Arthur Vernon with you."

The man Mr. Ames named was a sort of a confidential secretary and an all-around utility man in a social and professional way.

He was also the official spy and tattler. Arthur Vernon had few intimates, being very much devoted to Mr. Ames and his young son.

He knew how to play the companion to Robert, and he knew how to cajol the elder Ames into a good humor. He was adroit and tactful.

But he was also unscrupulous and tricky. He worshipped the dollar.

Robert Ames readily fell for his father's second suggestion. In the company of Arthur Vernon he set out the following day for Westchester, a small town on the bank of the Delaware River.

Both men were armed with duck shooting guns. They found plenty of good sport.

The cottage they had rented was presided over by a Japanese servant, who was a splendid cook as well as a trustworthy, efficient valet.

He took care of the personal wants of both men.

On the third day of their arrival at the cottage, Robert Ames saw a young girl passing. He gave her one

look and gasped.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, attracting Arthur Vernon's attention to the girl. "Did you ever see anything more bewitching? I must find out who she is. You don't happen to know do you?"

Vernon grinned.

"Yes, I do know," he declared. "She is Hazel Wynne, the daughter of a poor widow. But you better let her alone. She is not your kind."

"You must introduce me," Robert demanded with characteristic impulsiveness. "You can manage it somehow, Arthur. Please, be a good old pal, won't you? I simply must meet that girl."

Arthur Vernon gave his consent with some reluctance. The following day as they were on their way to another duck shooting expedition, they stopped at a small cottage which stood at the outskirs of the town.

This cottage had been erected on a large tract of land owned by Charles Ames, Robert's father.

Of course Arthur Vernon knew the poor widow who lived in that cottage for it had been his duty to collect the rent.

Upon entering they found an elderly woman, who still bore traces of former great beauty, seated in an invalid chair.

She made an attempt to rise, then sank back again with a painful sigh.

"Don't trouble yourself, Mrs. Wynne," Vernon said with a kindly smile. "We just stopped in for a drink of water."

"Hazel!" called the woman. "Hazel!"

In answer to the call a bewitchingly lovely young girl emerged from an adjoining room. She glanced shyly at Arthur Vernon, then her eyes rested for a moment on Robert Ames' handsome face.

"Bring these two gentlemen a drink of fresh water, Hazel," Mrs. Wynne ordered.

The girl obeyed with alacrity. When she was introduced to Robert Ames, she met his eyes frankly and unafraid. She trembled a little as he held her hand and pressed it gently.

"I am surely glad to know you, Miss Wynne," the young man exclaimed heartily.

The girl felt the same way about it, but she could not find words to express herself just then. After the two men had gone, she turned to her mother with a deep sigh.

"Isn't he nice," she murmured. "And so wonderfully good-looking."

"You better not think too much about that young man," the mother cautioned. "He is a multi-millionaire's son."

Hazel tried to remember that.

But, when the next day Robert Ames met her as she came from the grocery, loaded down with packages, she discovered that even a multi-millionaire's son can be very kind and accommodating.

He insisted upon carrying the packages.

They chatted pleasantly, and the little Love God did its work in the most efficient manner. The tiny arrow sped on its way and pierced Hazel Wynne's young heart right in the center.

Robert Ames suffered precisely the same kind of a wound. But he was happier than the girl.

Already his mind was made up that there never should be another woman in his life beside Miss Wynne. And even if his parents did not approve, he meant to marry her anyway.

During the week which followed they met every day. Neither Mrs. Wynne's expostulations nor Arthur

Vernon's oft-repeated warnings, had the slightest effect.

The young couple simply could not be separated.

It was Vernon's duty to report the incident to Robert's father and thus prevent an ill-advised matrimonial alliance. But this trusted servant and spy did nothing of the kind.

He frankly liked young Robert, who sooner or later would be the sole heir to all the Ames millions.

He considered it rank foolishness to oppose the young man.

Arthur Vernon did not believe that Robert's intentions with the lovely girl were serious. She would amuse him for a time, and then he would grow tired of her. The sons of the rich rarely marry the daughters of the poor.

And so, with a disagreeable smile, he allowed matters to drift on.

In the meantime Robert Ames and Hazel Wynne became inseparable.

What passed between them no one knew but themselves.

Then came the annual football game between Yale and Harvard. Young Ames, a fine athlete, had played on the Yale team.

Quite naturally he was anxious to be present at the game in order to root for his alma mater.

It was the evening before he left Westchester that he said goodby to Hazel. And she sobbed quietly to herself.

"Oh, I know you'll never come back dear," she wept.

"Indeed, I am coming back," he asserted stoutly. "No power on earth could keep me away from you, now, sweetheart. I'll be back in a week at the most. And you must promise to be true to me."

For an answer the young girl buried her wet face in his bosom. She threw both of her arms about his neck and drew his face down.

When her sweet, soft lips touched those of her lover, she trembled like a leaf.

The train which took him and Arthur Vernon back to Philadelphia the next morning, covered the distance in an amazingly short time.

The Ames family limousine awaited them at the station. In it sat Mrs. Ames, and her beautiful companion.

"My, but you are looking well, my boy," the mother said fondly as her son seated himself beside her. "Outdoor sport surely agrees with you."

"It does, mumsy," he replied, drawing an arm about her waist. "And I am very happy. I met the sweetest girl in the world down at Westchester. There isn't a movie actress in this country who could compare with Hazel Wynne for looks."

This outburst on the young man's part caused a sensation among the three listeners.

Alice Procter's face paled for a moment. Fierce jealousy clutched her heart. Mrs. Ames sat disagreeably surprised, and she looked accusingly at Arthur Vernon. The latter turned away to hide his discomfiture.

What a fool Robert Ames had been to speak of the simple country maiden in the presence of his aristocratic mother.

"Hazel Wynne?" Mrs. Ames said slowly. "The name sounds familiar. I believe a widow by that name is a tenant of your father's down at Westchester."

"That's her," cried the boy, his eyes sparkling.

Again Mrs. Ames glanced at Vernon accusingly and steadfastly.

Continued in next number

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